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From: Elliott, Rodney
Sent: Fri 8/14/2015 11:36:51 AM
Subject: New England Blog Report - Friday August 14th, 2015

Rodney Elliott

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WATTS, 50 YEARS LATER
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As Los Angeles reflects on the 50th anniversary of the 1965 Watts uprising, the community can celebrate new amenities such as Serenity Park on Monitor Avenue, a refurbished 109th Street swimming pool, the nearly complete 103rd Street streetscape project, the planned Children's Institute campus designed by Frank Gehry and chef Roy Choi's recently funded Loco'l restaurant.

But one crucial project is missing from this list: the redevelopment of Jordan Downs.

In 2011, the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles chose a developer to completely renovate this public housing complex -- once the most dangerous in Los Angeles. But meaningful work has yet to start and funding has yet to be secured.

We know what the source of the delay is -- the ineffectiveness of the Housing Authority. This city agency simply hasn't made the Jordan Downs project a priority.

In the meantime, Watts has become a national model for police/community relations. Young people from Jordan Downs and other public housing projects are being mentored and coached by Los Angeles Police Department officers and supported by an array of effective community groups, notably the Watts Gang Task Force. Crime at Jordan Downs has decreased 62.5% in the last five years.

Now more than ever Watts deserves a transformation for Jordan Downs that will match the strides made by the community. The plans call for the 43-acre World War II-era complex, one of four public housing projects in Watts, to be turned into a modern, 119-acre mixed-income, mixed-use urban village, complete with new stores, more open space and top-notch urban design. It will mean a better quality of life and lead to more opportunities for the residents of Jordan Downs and the surrounding community.

For the last two years, because of the Housing Authority's mismanagement and mistakes, the Jordan Downs project has been passed over twice in the competition for a \$30-million federal Choice Neighborhood Implementation grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

This year's application was disqualified because it was incomplete -- a letter from Mayor Eric Garcetti in support of the project wasn't submitted as required. Last year, the application failed to make it past the first round, even though this grant money is set aside specifically for rehabbing out-of-date public housing.

The Housing Authority has also failed in its attempt to win state grant money for the Jordan Downs project from California's carbon cap-and-trade program. That program, which auctions permits for greenhouse gas emissions, earmarks money for "green" projects, including transit-oriented affordable housing. Jordan Downs is just blocks from the Metro Blue Line, so it should qualify.

However, the Housing Authority's Jordan Downs application for these state funds scored only a 65. Two city projects that won cap-and-trade grants, in Harbor Gateway, scored more than 95 points. Those

applications were prepared by private firms.

There is no excuse for the failure to obtain these funds. I'm calling for new leadership at the Housing Authority; a new president and chief executive must make Jordan Downs a priority.

The Jordan Downs redevelopment plans more than meet the goals and criteria of these federal and state funding programs. The project has the support of every elected official who represents Watts in Washington, Sacramento and Los Angeles. It is an embarrassment and an outrage that the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles has been unable to secure the funding that could bring the Jordan Downs project into reality. Watts deserves better.

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Three days later and 1,200 miles south at the Buena Vista copper mine in Sonora, Mexico, 10 million gallons of mining acid turned the Bacanuchi and Sonora rivers orange with poisonous chemicals, shutting down drinking water supplies, closing schools and affecting an estimated 800,000 people. Called by Mexico's environment minister the "worst natural disaster provoked by the mining industry in the modern history of Mexico," the spill was apparently caused by recently constructed but defective holding tanks.

This trio of mining disasters is, or at least should be, a wake-up call. In an era of advancing climate change, fresh water is the indispensable natural resource, essential to life for everyone everywhere, and becoming more valuable with each day of deepening drought. Yet staggering quantities of this precious resource are consumed by mining exploration, operations and long-term maintenance. Each year, roughly 180 million tons of tailings flow into rivers, lakes and oceans -- an estimate that leaves out the unpermitted contamination caused by containment failures like those at Gold King, Mount Polley and Buena Vista.

Federal decision-makers should consider this damage as they decide whether to permit a host of massive mine projects around critical water bodies.

Best known is a proposal to build the largest copper and gold mine in North America at the headwaters of the world's greatest wild salmon fishery, in southwest Alaska, which produces 30 million to 50 million fish each year. If the Pebble Mine were built as planned, it would generate an estimated 10 billion tons of

mining waste laced with toxics -- about 3,000 pounds for every person on Earth -- to be contained forever in an area of high seismicity behind earthen dams as tall as the Three Gorges Dam in China. According to the EPA, the project poses a catastrophic risk to the waters of Bristol Bay, its wild salmon fishery and the \$1.5 billion in revenue and 14,000 jobs it sustains each year.

The battle over the Pebble Mine will set the stage for a long list of other proposed mining projects in risky proximity to critical waters: in Oregon, a nickel mine on a federally designated wild and scenic river that feeds the communities and natural wonders of the Northern California redwood coast; in Minnesota, copper and nickel mines that threaten the pristine waters of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness; in Montana, the Black Butte copper mine on Sheep Creek in the upper watershed of the Smith River, a state-designated Blue Ribbon Trout Fishery and an essential source of irrigation and stock water for ranchers.

Although mining industry advocates argue correctly that mining is essential -- copper, for example, is ubiquitous in our cars, phones, computers and appliances -- there's no denying that mining is a dirty business. According to the EPA, mining produces more toxic waste than any other industry -- about 25% of the entire U.S. toxics inventory.

The permissive General Mining Law of 1872, written to encourage mining, is still in force even though the pick, shovel and pan were long ago replaced by giant earthmovers that gouge open pits more than a mile across and thousands of feet deep. Billions of gallons of water are consumed in production, pumped through miles of vulnerable pipelines and stored in open pits of acidifying waste; huge swaths of land are destroyed in the wake of closed, abandoned and inadequately remediated mines.

After this month's mine disaster on the Animas, there is even less reason to believe the self-serving, impossible promises of mining executives who claim that with good engineering, they can protect our waters for centuries. Although cutting-edge technology should be mandatory for all mining today, not all areas are mandatory for mining. Assurances of safety must be skeptically reviewed. And some mining projects -- such as the Pebble Mine -- just aren't worth the risk.

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Outbreak has South Bronx on edge

08/12/2015
Los Angeles Times

This summer's deadly outbreak of Legionnaires' disease in the South Bronx was described by one politician here as an "unfortunate perfect storm" -- invisible clouds of contaminated mist from commercial cooling towers swirling down into one of this city's poorest areas, whose population already struggles with health problems associated with poverty.

The result: the worst outbreak of Legionnaires' disease in New York state history -- 115 cases and 12 deaths since the middle of July. No one was prepared for the ferociousness with which the disease struck the South Bronx.

That the outbreak occurred in one of the city's least-affluent areas was not lost on residents.

At a town hall meeting Tuesday, Shirley Doran, 75, said she and others in the South Bronx were looking for assurances that they were safe from the disease. "We want to know if it's all cleaned up," she said. "What's being done?"

City health officials emphasized that healthy people were less likely to contract the disease than those who were elderly, suffered from lung disease or had diabetes or other underlying conditions that weakened their immune systems.

"That is not comforting to us," one woman said at the town hall.

"We're having a lot of problems with breathing," said another woman who stood up to note that asthma is widespread in the area.

Legionnaires' disease is a pneumonia-like illness that is contracted by breathing in Legionella bacteria, usually from tainted vapors. Incubation time can be as long as 10 days. City officials were able to pinpoint cooling towers in commercial heating and air conditioning systems as the source.

The South Bronx is a mixture of residential neighborhoods and industry, and large cooling systems can be seen on many buildings dotting the area's gritty skyline. Of 39 such cooling towers in the South Bronx tested for Legionella since the outbreak began, 14 were found to have been contaminated, city officials said Wednesday. Six sites elsewhere in the Bronx also have tested positive.

Diana Hernandez, a professor of sociomedical sciences at the Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health and a South Bronx resident, described the neighborhood as one of "concentrated poverty ... saturated with poor health" in an op-ed piece published in Wednesday's New York Daily News.

"These conditions make the South Bronx ground zero for diseases that prey on the most vulnerable -- of which Legionnaires' disease is one," Hernandez wrote.

Research clearly documents the poverty and poor health in the South Bronx.

A 2014 study published on the state's Health Department website said Bronx County was the unhealthiest in the state, "burdened by a myriad of health challenges and socioeconomic circumstances that foster poor health outcomes." Its residents suffered from high rates of diabetes, heart disease, asthma, cancer and obesity, the study said.

And the South Bronx has fared even worse, crippled by the weight of extreme poverty. In four neighborhoods -- Mott Haven, Melrose, Hunts Point and Longwood -- the poverty rate among residents in 2013 stood at 42.3%, more than double the citywide rate of 20.9%, according to a report by the New York University Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy.

State Sen. Jose M. Serrano, a lifelong resident of the South Bronx, is certain the overall poor health of the area was a factor in how quickly the disease spread.

"We have an aging population and all of the issues that go along with health disparities -- access to healthcare, access to healthy food, access to green space," Serrano said in an interview. "When you add them all up and put them all together, they create this unfortunate perfect storm where an outbreak of Legionnaires' disease can have a devastating effect."

Over the last several weeks, as the deadly impact of the outbreak struck home, city officials moved quickly to test and clean cooling towers in the Bronx, reassure residents by holding town hall meetings and distributing thousands of informational fliers, and draft legislation that would require regular monitoring and cleaning of such towers across the city -- regulations that had not been in place before this latest Legionnaires' emergency.

Democratic Gov. Andrew Cuomo said he would impose similar regulations across the entire state.

The city was not without warning that cooling towers were potential culprits for Legionnaires' disease outbreaks. In January, eight cases at a housing complex in another part of the Bronx were linked to a cooling tower. And a water system at a senior citizens' center in Flushing, Queens, was deemed the source of nine cases reported there in May.

Health officials say they see 200 to 300 cases of Legionnaires' disease in the city each year, but never in the concentrated way it appeared in the South Bronx this summer.

A study published by city Health Department researchers in November identified risk factors of Legionnaires' disease in the city by analyzing cases between 2002 and 2011. The results foreshadowed the South Bronx disaster.

"Overall, incidence of Legionnaires' disease in the city of New York increased 230% from 2002 to 2009 and followed a socioeconomic gradient, with highest incidence occurring in the highest poverty areas," the study's findings stated.

At a town hall meeting last week, Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. said he would make sure that the government responded adequately to the crisis, adding that residents of the South Bronx would not tolerate being treated like "second-class citizens." His remarks drew applause from the several hundred people in the audience.

Several days later, Diaz bypassed Mayor Bill de Blasio and contacted Cuomo for help. The governor responded by sending teams of state health officials, joined by representatives of the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, to the Bronx to expand the testing of cooling towers outside the area affected most.

And while Diaz has not directly criticized the city's actions, he said in an interview, "We needed to see more of an effort, more hands on deck. We needed to make sure that we addressed the problem that people are dying."

With the outbreak appearing to be on the wane, residents of the South Bronx remain scared and vulnerable even as they go about their usual business.

During the evening commute Tuesday, people streamed out of the subway stop at the Grand Concourse and 149th Street, a hub of the South Bronx. Sidewalks were crowded and residents stopped to pick up groceries on their way home.

But signs that not all was right in the neighborhood were evident. At the post office on one corner of the intersection, steps were cordoned off with police tape and the doors locked while the building was being testing for Legionella. Officials announced Wednesday that it had tested positive.

"I'm sometimes scared and worried," said George Heyward, 47, a resident who attended Tuesday's town hall. "Where did it start and how are you going to get rid of it?"

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A palatial fixer-upper in London
08/12/2015
Los Angeles Times

They reign and rule over Britain, but now there's a plague on both their houses.

Queen Elizabeth II and members of the British Parliament live and work in this country's two most iconic buildings: Buckingham Palace for her, the Palace of Westminster for them. But moisture, mice and moth-eaten heating and electrical systems, among other ills, are turning both structures into something of a nightmare for their illustrious inhabitants.

Conditions inside the 19th century buildings have become so dire that they threaten to achieve what the

Nazi blitz of London could not: force Her Majesty, the noble peers in the House of Lords and the uppity members of the House of Commons to abandon their digs, at least while refurbishment is undertaken.

Surveyors and engineers warn of an urgent need for asbestos removal, better plumbing, pest control, upgraded wiring, improved fire safety and repairs to the crumbling masonry, a large chunk of which came perilously close to nailing Princess Anne's car after detaching from a Buckingham Palace parapet in 2007.

But spending billions in taxpayer money on nicer accommodation for politicians and the royal family is a tough sell at a time when the government is promising the deepest cuts in welfare and other social spending in at least a generation. Plenty of Brits believe that their elected representatives, as well as their unelected dynasts, have dipped their hands liberally enough into the public purse.

To Dickie Arbiter, that's a shortsighted view.

"All these are government buildings," said Arbiter, who spent a dozen years toiling within the elegant confines of Buckingham Palace as Elizabeth's press secretary before retiring. "Our children and grandchildren and their children won't thank us if we allow these buildings to fall into a state of disrepair."

He scoffs at suggestions that his former boss, one of the world's richest women, ought to fund her own home improvements. The queen does not actually own Buckingham Palace; it's held "in trust" for use by the reigning monarch.

"There are those cynics who say, 'Well, the queen lives there, she should pay for it,' which is a bit like saying, 'Obama lives at the White House, let him take care of it,' " Arbiter said.

Regardless of who foots the bill (and it won't be the footman), the price tag would be enormous.

Buckingham Palace is basically a 240-bedroom, 78-bathroom fixer-upper (great location!) that would cost an estimated \$230 million to bring up to modern standards.

Some redecorating is definitely in order: For all its opulent trappings, the last time the interiors were spruced up was around the time of the queen's coronation. That was 62 years ago.

The boiler hasn't been overhauled in about as long. Royal minions have had to set out buckets to catch water dripping from the roof in the gallery where Elizabeth's priceless art collection is kept.

Across St. James' Park, a makeover for the Gothic Revival Palace of Westminster -- famed for the clock tower mistakenly called Big Ben, which is actually the name of the giant bell inside the belfry -- would cost significantly more. According to an independent appraisal released in June, the project could run from \$5.4 billion to \$8.8 billion.

Mark Tami, a member of Parliament from the Liverpool area, said a "major intervention" is clearly necessary.

"You're talking about a building which is in the center of London, which is exposed to the elements and pollution," he said. "There comes a point where just the odd patching here and there won't suffice."

The roof leaks, the pipes are corroding and much of the communication cabling is inadequate for the demands of the digital age. It took "quite a time" to install broadband and Wi-Fi, Tami said; connection speeds remain erratic.

Tami sits on a "restoration and renewal" parliamentary committee that is expected to decide early next year whether to embrace one of the renovation plans outlined in the June report.

The least expensive option would require Parliament to move out of the Palace of Westminster for six

years. That's called a "full decant" -- an apt description for a place where lawmakers hobnob in their own private bar overlooking the Thames and where some have been known to cast votes on legislation in a "tired and emotional" state (a popular euphemism for "falling-down drunk").

The most expensive option would allow the 650 members of the House of Commons and assorted scarlet-robed lords and ladies mostly to stay put, with partial closures of the building on a rolling basis over 32 years.

But despite its steep \$8.8-billion cost, the plan would only cover retrofitting the palace to minimum standards, including better access for the disabled and improved fire prevention. Lawmakers would also have to endure the racket and disruption that any homeowner who has ever done a renovation is all too familiar with.

Convincing the public of the merits of any of the choices will be a challenge. Although many Britons relish the idea of politicians being driven out of their offices, they would be less keen to know it was part of an overall scheme to provide them with more lavish public housing.

"If you want to have an efficient government, if you want our representatives do a proper job, they need to have a proper workplace," said Steven Fielding, a political scientist at the University of Nottingham.

But "how it has been framed is of MPs just looking after themselves.... The way it'll probably end up is they'll spend the money, it'll cause a stink and it'll be filed in the back of people's memories as, 'This is another reason why we don't like them.' "

Other suggestions have been floated, including taking Parliament on the road with stops around the country, or ditching the Palace of Westminster altogether for a more modern, more modest facility, to match Britain's decline from the imperial colossus it was when the palace went up in Victorian times. The green, red and gold interior is littered with reminders of empire, in statues and paintings of events such as the Battle of Waterloo.

Those alternatives are about as likely as the queen abdicating. For all the money that refurbishing the Palace of Westminster and Buckingham Palace would require, the historical and symbolic value of the two buildings -- where momentous decisions affecting both Britain and the world have been made -- is incalculable for this tradition-loving nation.

Plus, they bring in tourists, who pay \$28 to visit the Houses of Parliament and \$32 to gawk at Buckingham Palace's staterooms.

"If they were to propose in America to move the Senate and House out and build them a new building, there would probably be a massive outcry about that," Tami said.

"Buckingham Palace symbolizes the institution of monarchy. It's where everyone expects to be entertained by the sovereign," said Arbiter, whose recent memoir, "On Duty With the Queen," chronicles his years in service to the crown.

The royal family probably would be less inconvenienced than lawmakers by a move. Elizabeth, who is in good health at 89, already spends weekends and summers at Windsor Castle outside London and Balmoral Castle in Scotland, respectively. She could live comfortably in either place, or at her privately owned country retreat in Sandringham, in eastern England.

Buckingham Palace is where she mostly conducts state business on weekdays -- "a bit like living above a shop when you're on duty in London," Arbiter said.

The queen has never openly complained about the condition of Buckingham Palace. But no doubt she'd like to see her principal pad since childhood, with its 775 rooms, kept in better shape.

"She certainly wouldn't utter anything like that in public," Arbiter said. "It's really for the officials in that department to browbeat the powers that be to dish out the money, to say this building is going to fall to pieces unless something is done about it."

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Officials at odds over when to reopen spill-tainted river
08/12/2015
Los Angeles Times

Friction continued Wednesday between state and federal officials over whether it's safe to reopen the Animas River in southern Colorado to recreation one week after 3 million gallons of spilled mine waste turned the waters a sickish mustard color.

Colorado officials say the concentration of metals in the river is decreasing and want the river reopened to boating and fishing, crucial elements of the state's economy. And they want the federal Environmental Protection Agency, whose workers triggered the spill during a cleanup operation last week at the Gold King Mine, to move faster in its assessment of the river's health.

EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy on Wednesday toured the riverside in Durango, Colo., saying tests showed the levels of various metals had returned to normal.

"I visited the river and took a look at it myself, and the good news is that it seems to be restoring itself," she said. "We're hoping for a return to some sense of normalcy for the use of this river, but the EPA is letting science be its guide."

Earlier, Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper's office released a statement that symbolized the frustration felt by thousands of residents who have been told to stay away from the river until further notice.

"Even though the state and EPA may disagree on the timing, the state's initial analysis shows the water is significantly improved with little risk to human health at this time," the statement said. "Reopening the river is a local decision, so the sooner we give the community and local officials the facts, the better for everyone, especially those who rely on the river for business."

Tuesday brought a terse exchange between Hickenlooper and Shaun McGrath, a regional administrator for the EPA, who asked the governor to stop making comments that the river was returning to good health.

"It doesn't show where we are at right now," McGrath said. "You have to have a couple of days of data to show that you're actually back to baseline conditions, and we're not there yet."

A miffed Hickenlooper responded: "That's nonsense." He said closed businesses were waiting for word of the river's reopening.

An EPA official said McCarthy was pushing for timely results of any study on metals set loose in the river, including arsenic, copper, lead and zinc. "The word we're getting is, 'Either show that it's safe or it isn't,'" said the official, who asked not to be named because he was not authorized to comment on the situation. "She's equally impatient."

Water-rafting companies have been closed for days, but one company said it wanted to be sure of the river's safety before allowing customers to return.

"We certainly want to get back to business. A lot of us who are river users ourselves want to get back out there, but we don't want to put people in harm's way," said Matt Gerhardt, manager of the retail store at 4 Corners Whitewater in Durango. "We want to make sure that the contaminant levels are not an issue."

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THE DAY IN SPORTS
08/12/2015
Los Angeles Times

Kei Nishikori beat Pablo Andujar, 6-3, 6-3, on Wednesday in the ATP Tour's Rogers Cup in Montreal.

David Goffin, seeded 13th, will be Nishikori's opponent in the round of 16 on Thursday. Goffin beat Sam Querrey, 6-4, 6-4.

Seventh-seeded Rafael Nadal got his tournament started with a 7-6 (4), 6-3 victory over Sergiy Stakhovsky. Nadal will face Mikhail Youzny, a 6-1, 6-4 winner over ninth-seeded Gilles Simon.

Second-seeded Andy Murray beat Tommy Robredo, 6-4, 7-5, in a rain-delayed match that started Tuesday night. American Jack Sock downed 14th-seeded Grigor Dimitrov, 5-7, 7-6 (5), 7-5, to advance to a meeting with top-seeded Novak Djokovic.

Defending champion Jo-Wilfried Tsonga outlasted Roberto Bautista Agut, 5-7, 7-6 (6), 7-5.

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In Toronto, Ukrainian qualifier Lesia Tsurenko upset Garbine Muguruza, 7-5, 6-1, in the Rogers Cup.

Second-seeded Simona Halep of Romania and fifth-seeded Ana Ivanovic of Serbia also advanced to the third round, while third-seeded Petra Kvitova of the Czech Republic and fourth-seeded Caroline Wozniacki of Denmark were beaten.

ETC.

Florida State lawsuit upheld

A district judge denied Florida State's motion to dismiss the lawsuit filed by former student Erica Kinsman in a ruling on Wednesday.

Kinsman has said former Florida State quarterback Jameis Winston sexually assaulted her in 2012. Her lawsuit against the university's board of trustees states the school failed to properly investigate or respond to her allegation, which denied her educational benefits. She is seeking monetary damages.

The next step in the suit is for depositions to be scheduled following Judge Mark Walker's ruling.

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Michigan State linebacker Ed Davis is out for the season after injuring his knee in practice Wednesday. The school said Davis will need surgery. Davis, a fifth-year senior, was an honorable mention All-Big Ten selection last season.

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A Hawaii man has been sentenced to five years in prison for using Robert Allenby's credit cards after the professional golfer said he was robbed and beaten in Honolulu.

According to the Honolulu prosecutor's office, Owen Harbison was sentenced Wednesday.

He was arrested in February on identity theft and other charges. He pleaded guilty in June to using Allenby's credit cards and ID to make purchases, including gift cards, jewelry and clothing.

Allenby recounted a bizarre saga earlier this year of having no memory of what happened for 21/2 hours after he left a Honolulu restaurant in January. He had missed the cut at the Sony Open and went to dinner. He said he woke up in a park with a bloodied face. It's still unclear what happened.

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Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker took a break from the presidential campaign trail to commit \$250 million in taxpayer money to pay for a new arena for the Milwaukee Bucks.

Calling the new NBA stadium a "dynamic attraction for the entire state of Wisconsin," Walker signed the bill at the Wisconsin State Fair Park surrounded by state lawmakers, local officials and Bucks President Peter Feigin.

Taxpayers will contribute \$250 million to the arena over 20 years, although that commitment will grow to \$400 million with interest. Current and former team owners will spend another \$250 million.

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The International Olympic Committee ruled out conducting viral tests of Rio de Janeiro's sewage-laden waterways ahead of the 2016 games, a top official said, despite an Associated Press study showing dangerously high levels of disease-causing viruses at all aquatic venues.

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FOR THE RECORD
08/12/2015
Los Angeles Times

River spill: In the Aug. 12 Section A, an article about the contamination of Colorado's Animas River referred to Jared Blumenfeld as an Environmental Protection Agency spokesman. He is the EPA's administrator for the Pacific Southwest Region.

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Ocean temps highest of year
08/12/2015
Los Angeles Times

In another sign that El Nino is gaining strength and could soak California this winter, sea surface temperatures in the Pacific Ocean have increased to their highest level so far this year.

That temperature increase -- 3.4 degrees Fahrenheit above the average -- was recorded Aug. 5 by the National Weather Service's Climate Prediction Center at a benchmark location in the Pacific.

That is slightly higher than it was Aug. 6, 1997, when it was 3.2 degrees Fahrenheit above normal.

The summer of 1997 was the prelude to the largest El Nino event on record. Storms that winter brought widespread flooding and mudslides, causing 17 deaths and more than half a billion dollars of damage. Downtown L.A. got nearly a year's worth of rain in February 1998.

"El Nino is already strong, and likely to get stronger by fall," Daniel Swain, climate scientist at Stanford University, said by email Wednesday.

"Here in California, we'll still have to wait for the midwinter months for the main effects to arrive, but the likeliest outcome is still a wetter-than-average winter for most, if not all, of California," he said.

Because El Nino's effects don't typically happen with great intensity in California in the summer, there probably won't be much drought relief for a while.

"Unfortunately, that means we still have to get through at least two to three more months of fire season and unabated severe drought conditions," Swain said.

That's bad news for firefighters, who are battling massive blazes this summer in Northern California. The fire season for Southern California typically hits a bit later in the fall with Santa Ana winds.

El Nino is a weather phenomenon that involves the warming of ocean waters west of Peru, which causes changes in the atmosphere that can dramatically alter weather patterns worldwide.

One effect of a strong El Nino is the shifting toward California of a subtropical jet stream that normally pours rain over the jungles of southern Mexico and Central America.

The National Weather Service's Climate Prediction Center is set to release its monthly El Nino forecast at 6 a.m. Pacific time Thursday.

For all the excitement about El Nino, Swain urged some caution.

"A wet winter is never a guarantee in California," he said. "I think a good way to think about it is this: There is essentially no other piece of information that is more useful in predicting California winter precipitation several months in advance than the existence of a strong El Nino event. But it's still just one piece of the puzzle. So while the likelihood of a wet winter is increasing, we still can't rule out other outcomes."

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LOS ANGELES
08/12/2015
Los Angeles Times

Can 96 million plastic balls improve water quality?

Los Angeles is about to find out. Mayor Eric Garcetti was at the Los Angeles Reservoir on Monday to mark the addition of 20,000 of the small balls to the lake. But what exactly are they -- and how will they help?

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What are those black things in the Los Angeles Reservoir?

They're shade balls, which are used to protect water quality, prevent algae growth and slow evaporation from the city's reservoirs. The L.A. Reservoir is the Department of Water and Power's largest in-basin facility.

Its surface is 175 acres, and it holds more than 3.3 billion gallons of water. The shade balls are expected to save 300 million gallons a year from evaporating from this particular reservoir.

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Why is this project in the news now?

Garcetti helped DWP officials release the final 20,000 shade balls into the reservoir Monday. "In the midst of California's historic drought, it takes bold ingenuity to maximize my goals for water conservation. This effort by LADWP is emblematic of the kind of creative thinking we need to meet those challenges," Garcetti said.

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So how much did this project cost? Weren't there alternatives to placing millions of plastic balls in the water?

It cost \$34.5 million, which comes to about 36 cents per shade ball. Artisan Screen Printing, a company based in Azusa, supplied 89.6 million of the balls. The remaining 6.4 million came from XavierC LLC in Glendora.

Because of the size of the reservoir, DWP could not install one protective cover. Instead, utility officials would have had to divide the reservoir in two and install two separate covers at a cost of \$300 million.

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Is it safe to put that plastic in our water?

DWP says this is perfectly safe. The 4-inch-diameter balls are made from high-density polyethylene, which is the same material you would find in a one-gallon milk jug.

This plastic is approved to come into contact with drinking water.

The balls do not emit any chemicals, according to the DWP. They should last 10 years. At some point, they will lose their structural integrity and could split at the seams.

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Why are the balls black?

Carbon black was added to the plastic to stabilize the balls in UV light from the sun.

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Is this the first time DWP has used shade balls in a reservoir?

No. In fact, it's been a fairly common practice for the utility since 2008. The Upper Stone, Elysian and Ivanhoe reservoirs all have shade balls to protect their water quality and prevent evaporation.

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Who came up with the idea for shade balls?

Shade balls are the brainchild of Brian White, who was a biologist with the utility. He based the idea on "bird balls" that he observed in waterways near airport runways.

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THE STATE
08/12/2015
Los Angeles Times

When 28 pounds of heroin made it across the U.S.-Mexico border near Calexico in April, it didn't come by the usual methods of car, truck or tunnel. It came by drone, federal authorities said Wednesday, making it the first cross-border seizure by U.S. law enforcement involving the new smuggle-by-air tactic.

Two men pleaded guilty Tuesday to retrieving the drugs near California Highway 98 in Imperial County, which was captured on Border Patrol cameras on April 28, according to court records.

"With border security tight, drug traffickers have thought of every conceivable method to move their drugs over, under and through the border," U.S. Atty. Laura Duffy said in a statement.

U.S. law enforcement officials call the use of drug-laden drones from Mexico an emerging threat, yet at the same time have questioned how profitable the practice can be because drones, or unmanned aerial vehicles, are limited in how much they can carry.

Lauren Mack, spokeswoman for U.S. Homeland Security Investigations in San Diego, said authorities have been prepared for cross-border drones since at least last year when they received a tip that smuggling operators might be considering the tactic.

Thus far, the activity appears to be mostly test runs, authorities said.

Drones as a drug-smuggling tool made news in January when one hauling meth crashed in the parking lot of a Tijuana shopping center, two miles from the U.S. border. It was loaded with about seven pounds of drugs and was probably being ferried from neighborhood to neighborhood, Mexican law enforcement said.

Months later, Border Patrol camera operators spotted a person carrying a large object in a field near Calexico who waved down a vehicle, according to the complaint. The large item was thrown in the trunk, and the person climbed into the passenger seat.

Agents stopped the vehicle nearby and found a duffel bag full of heroin in the trunk.

The driver, Jonathan Elias, 18, told agents in an interview that he'd known the passenger, Brayan Valle, for about a month, according to the complaint. He said Valle had called asking him to pick him and the drugs up for \$100. Valle, 19, also admitted picking up the drugs, as well as a drone controller, according

to his plea agreement.

Each pleaded guilty Tuesday in El Centro federal court to one count of possession of drugs with intent to distribute. They are set to be sentenced in San Diego on Oct. 20. Their plea agreements don't give further details about the drone or who operated it.

Small drones, which have become easily accessible and affordable to the general public, can fly up to an hour and as far as five miles, and some can be navigated by preset GPS coordinates. Mexican media have reported that drug cartels are commissioning engineers for custom-made drones.

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Heat wave intensifies fire threat
08/12/2015
Los Angeles Times

Northern winds that siphon moisture from the air. Flames that run rampant at night after aircraft have been grounded. Flying embers that spark more blazes. And now, rising temperatures are expected throughout the state.

The obstacles are only intensifying for crews fighting wildfires across Northern California, where years of drought have altered the landscape and set an unpredictable stage.

More than 11,000 firefighters are now battling blazes across the state, which has seen about 292,000 acres burned this year -- significantly more than last year at this time, according to fire officials.

"We have a long road ahead of us," said California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection Capt. Amy Head. "Our most large and damaging fires are usually much farther down the road -- September and October. We're already seeing these types of burning conditions."

In a move that veteran fire officials say they have never seen before, the U.S. Forest Service has pulled firefighters from all 50 states and Puerto Rico to help.

"That's remarkable," said Stanton Florea, a U.S. Forest Service spokesman. There's not just the fires we have, but anticipating additional fire activity."

A high-pressure system north of the Bay Area is expected to send temperatures toward triple digits, according to the National Weather Service. With it could come gusts of wind that send sparks flying.

"We're working furiously on this before that weather pattern kicks in," said Steve Swindle, a fire engineer with Ventura County who is assisting Cal Fire on the Jerusalem blaze.

Crews are already dealing with northern winds that suck moisture from coastline breezes. And although fires typically die down with cooler night temperatures, many this year have exploded under the cover of darkness when aircraft can't help ground crews.

"It just stays dry and windy all night," National Weather Service meteorologist Brad Charboneau said. "When you've got fires already going like this, any kind of gusty winds and low [moisture] recovery is going to cause problems."

On state-controlled lands, Cal Fire said, there were more than 4,300 fires through Saturday. That's about

1,300 more than compared to 2014.

This year's blazes have burned nearly 118,000 acres, or about 40,000 more acres than last year at this time, Cal Fire said. The five-year average for this time of year is about 2,800 fires burning 53,000 acres.

"You need to think there's four years of drought, so it's a little bit skewed. It's actually even more significant," Head said. "There's a lot more fires happening. It's all related to the drought."

A prime example is the Wragg fire, which burned for two weeks in Napa and Solano counties until it was contained Aug. 5, Head said. Authorities believe the blaze was sparked by a car crash and fueled by winds. It got into steep hills and rugged terrain, rapidly burning 8,000 acres.

"Normally there's some moisture in the fuels this time of year ... we're well past that. They're already dead, dry fuel," she said. "On the Wragg fire, we were experiencing triple-digit temperatures and single-digit humidity. You get really explosive fire behavior. We can't get ahead of it, it's creating so much heat."

At 88% contained Wednesday, the Rocky fire -- the largest of the 16 active fires in the state at nearly 70,000 acres -- has been somewhat tamed since it broke out two weeks ago near Clear Lake. It quickly defied computer models and simulations, devouring 20,000 acres in five hours.

Officials were bewildered by the fire, which created a mushroom cloud of smoke and ash that every so often plummeted to the ground and sent flames and wind rushing in all directions.

A turning point came late last week, when the temperature dropped and moisture blanketed the area, allowing crews to double the containment of the blaze in two days, according to a Cal Fire official.

Now the big concern is the Jerusalem fire, burning directly to the south.

It broke out Sunday and has burned through 16,500 acres of heavy brush.

Fire officials say access is nearly impossible in some areas because of rugged terrain.

At one point the Jerusalem fire rubbed shoulders with the Rocky fire and the two threatened to merge.

To block the union, crews deliberately set fire to an unburned portion between the two, eliminating dry fuel in the area.

The two fires have many residents on edge.

Christian Ahlmann, 32, said the sky around his hometown of Clearlake has been filled with dark smoke and the rumbling of low-flying planes for days.

At his family's winery, flames jumped a containment line and consumed about 200 acres of land used for cattle grazing.

"It has been a rough two weeks," he said. "We have been on our toes every day."

Having already evacuated once because of the Rocky fire, he was troubled when employees spotted a new plume of smoke, this time from the Jerusalem fire creeping over nearby hills.

"It seemed almost surreal," he said. "We are the Grand Central Station for fire season this year."

Residents across Colusa, Lake and Yolo counties -- where 96 structures, including 43 homes, have been destroyed -- returned to their homes.

But those in Lake and Napa counties remain evacuated.

The causes of the Rocky and Jerusalem fires are under investigation.

Officials now worry that the upcoming heat wave could create the same conditions that whipped the Rocky fire into a frenzy.

The heat wave will also extend to Southern California, with higher than normal temperatures expected through early next week.

The hottest areas will be places such as Woodland Hills and Burbank, where temperatures could top out at 103 and 98 degrees, respectively, by the weekend, said Stuart Seto of the National Weather Service.

Downtown Los Angeles will bake in above-average heat Saturday and Sunday, when temperatures could hit 91 degrees, Seto said.

The temperatures, though not record-breaking, are still about 10 degrees above average for this time of year, Seto said.

The weather for the last week has been cooler than usual, he added.

The heat will bring an increased risk of fire in the drought-parched mountains and hills.

Although the humidity is not expected to drop low enough to trigger wildfire warnings, years of drought and 10-mph to 20-mph winds expected this weekend can turn any spark into a dangerous fire, Seto said.

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Times staff writer Veronica Rocha contributed to this report.

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WATTS, 50 YEARS LATER

08/12/2015

Los Angeles Times

As Los Angeles reflects on the 50th anniversary of the 1965 Watts uprising, the community can celebrate new amenities such as Serenity Park on Monitor Avenue, a refurbished 109th Street swimming pool, the nearly complete 103rd Street streetscape project, the planned Children's Institute campus designed by Frank Gehry and chef Roy Choi's recently funded Loco'l restaurant.

But one crucial project is missing from this list: the redevelopment of Jordan Downs.

In 2011, the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles chose a developer to completely renovate this public housing complex -- once the most dangerous in Los Angeles. But meaningful work has yet to start and funding has yet to be secured.

We know what the source of the delay is -- the ineffectiveness of the Housing Authority. This city agency simply hasn't made the Jordan Downs project a priority.

In the meantime, Watts has become a national model for police/community relations. Young people from Jordan Downs and other public housing projects are being mentored and coached by Los Angeles Police Department officers and supported by an array of effective community groups, notably the Watts Gang Task Force. Crime at Jordan Downs has decreased 62.5% in the last five years.

Now more than ever Watts deserves a transformation for Jordan Downs that will match the strides made by the community. The plans call for the 43-acre World War II-era complex, one of four public housing projects in Watts, to be turned into a modern, 119-acre mixed-income, mixed-use urban village, complete with new stores, more open space and top-notch urban design. It will mean a better quality of life and lead to more opportunities for the residents of Jordan Downs and the surrounding community.

For the last two years, because of the Housing Authority's mismanagement and mistakes, the Jordan Downs project has been passed over twice in the competition for a \$30-million federal Choice Neighborhood Implementation grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

This year's application was disqualified because it was incomplete -- a letter from Mayor Eric Garcetti in support of the project wasn't submitted as required. Last year, the application failed to make it past the first round, even though this grant money is set aside specifically for rehabbing out-of-date public housing.

The Housing Authority has also failed in its attempt to win state grant money for the Jordan Downs project from California's carbon cap-and-trade program. That program, which auctions permits for greenhouse gas emissions, earmarks money for "green" projects, including transit-oriented affordable housing. Jordan Downs is just blocks from the Metro Blue Line, so it should qualify.

However, the Housing Authority's Jordan Downs application for these state funds scored only a 65. Two city projects that won cap-and-trade grants, in Harbor Gateway, scored more than 95 points. Those applications were prepared by private firms.

There is no excuse for the failure to obtain these funds. I'm calling for new leadership at the Housing Authority; a new president and chief executive must make Jordan Downs a priority.

The Jordan Downs redevelopment plans more than meet the goals and criteria of these federal and state funding programs. The project has the support of every elected official who represents Watts in Washington, Sacramento and Los Angeles. It is an embarrassment and an outrage that the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles has been unable to secure the funding that could bring the Jordan Downs project into reality. Watts deserves better.

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LETTERS
08/12/2015
Los Angeles Times

Fool's gold

Re "Downriver states take aim at EPA," Aug. 12

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's words of reassurance and comfort after the Colorado mine spill into the Animas and San Juan rivers should not be trusted. Those placating words do not have the historical ring of truth.

I've long noticed that in the wake of any accidental spill or contamination -- be it British Petroleum oil in the Gulf of Mexico or the nuclear disaster in Fukushima, Japan -- authorities, at least initially, downplay the danger and potential long-lasting damage from the accident.

We are predictably told not to worry our pretty little heads about the seriousness of the contamination. It's only later that the appalling truth becomes apparent: that the toxic slop left behind is, in fact, a major problem, cleanup costs continue to skyrocket and formerly life-giving water becomes life-taking water devoid of aquatic life and a danger to all.

Linda Nicholes

Huntington Beach

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I hope this puts the final nail in the coffin of the proposed Pebble Mine above Bristol Bay in Alaska that would impound untold millions of tons of toxic waste just above one of the richest fisheries on Earth. Same for several new mines proposed at the headwaters of some of the most important salmon rivers in British Columbia.

If this spill derails those projects, that is the only silver lining to this fiasco.

My heart breaks for the Animas River and all the people and animals dependent on it. Of course, mining waste has come down this river many times before.

I have taken the steam train along the river several times and always noticed that not only did the river seem unnaturally blue but that all of the rocks along the banks are stained with the same bright yellow color as the toxic sludge going down the river now. Point being, it may have supported trout recently, but you couldn't get me to drink out of it even before this happened.

Crista Worthy

Boise, Ida.

::

Rio de Las Animas de Perdidas is the full name of the river contaminated in Colorado. The River of Lost Souls flows past my childhood home in Aztec, N.M.

How many fish, birds and other wildlife, livestock, pets and people will be lost now? Has the soul of the river been lost forever?

EPA Regional Administrator Shaun McGrath said, "I want to come clean here." That was a bad choice of words. He can come clean, but will the river ever become clean?

Katy Scott Moss

Laguna Beach

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Of 'aliens' and Californians

Re "State drops references to immigrants as 'aliens,'" Aug. 11

Gov. Jerry Brown is my contemporary. I imagine that he, like me, read George Orwell's "1984" in his youth.

Despite Brown's signing of a recent bill striking the word "alien" from the California labor code -- and

actions taken by others to do away with the term "illegal alien" in favor of "undocumented" to describe immigrants who are illegally in the United States (in violation of federal law) -- people residing in California without permission are in fact illegal aliens, as opposed to legal aliens who have complied with federal law.

The word "alien" is not an insult. This legislation -- an unnecessary and politically correct reinterpretation of a common word -- is an insult to citizens of the United States.

Joseph F. Paggi Jr.

Pasadena

::

In the late 1970s, I arrived at JFK airport in New York a legal immigrant, excited and happy to be a part of this country, only to have that excitement turn into tremendous dispiritedness when I read the word "alien" on my green card.

Until then, I'd only connected that word with extraterrestrial life forms.

Now, as a naturalized citizen, I still recall with great clarity my mixed emotions on that first day: a disquieting sense of betrayal, embarrassment, anger, confusion, hurt and sadness, even shame. I felt like a child who is warmly welcomed to her new school, only to have the class bully spit on her from behind.

Thank you, California. Better late than never.

Bhuvana Chandra

Porter Ranch

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How ironic, the history of California.

After Mexico won its independence from Spain early in the 19th century, California was under its control, and it had difficulty preventing Americans from immigrating to its territory -- something it had tried to do, often with force. But the Mexican authorities in California did offer relief for immigrants who agreed to become Mexican citizens and conform to Mexican laws.

Now that the reverse situation is presented, the authorities in California are again compelled to consider alternatives to outright expulsion.

Gary Hastings

Redondo Beach

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Teachers deserve justice too

Re "The trouble with LAUSD's 'teacher jail,' " Editorial, Aug. 10

Thank you for the insightful editorial. I would like to point out that in addition to disrupting student learning, the practice of removing teachers from the classroom with little explanation and for an indeterminate period also harms good, caring educators who have been falsely accused and subsequently lose the careers they love.

Many of us have fallen victim to this devious and unfair practice. It is devastating in many ways and needs to be stopped.

Yes, investigate when an accusation is made; however, do it quickly and fairly, and if the investigation reveals the teacher has done nothing wrong, then reinstate him or her so that neither they nor their students suffer.

Karen Logan

Pasadena

::

Your editorial reflects a problem that goes beyond the Los Angeles Unified School District. We are living in an era of fear on the part of institutions -- fear of being accused of lack of sensitivity in areas such as race and gender.

Rather than gamble on a more judicious, less destructive approach and risking harsh criticism for not having done enough, L.A. Unified took the draconian action of "jailing" teachers. There could not be a greater demonstration of the district's concern for child safety. And, given the charged social climate on the issue of child safety, the pain and injustice to both teachers and students was, for the district, a rational choice.

Hopefully, your editorial will help to modify the equation.

Jack Kaczorowski

Los Angeles

--

Housing, yes, but with limits

Re "Easing L.A.'s housing crunch," Opinion, Aug. 10

To whom is Paul Habibi appealing in writing that Los Angeles should adopt a more lenient standard for affordable housing; that certain projects should be able to bypass the site review plans?

Habibi is the principal and co-founder of one of the largest owners and developers of multifamily housing in L.A. County; it would certainly be more convenient for his company to be able to build at will, bypassing those inconvenient neighborhood groups and impact studies that serve as the last bastion against unrestrained development.

If Habibi's advice were to be taken and canyons of taller buildings lined the cityscape, what provisions would be made for the thousands of additional vehicles of those commuting new residents? What new water sources would slake their thirst?

As a 30-year subscriber to The Times, I cannot honestly remember a more self-serving piece.

Christian Stevens

Los Angeles

--

In praise of Columbia House

Re "Bye, Columbia House," Column, Aug. 11

I actually have fond memories of Columbia House when I was growing up.

Yes, you had to commit to buying more records in the coming year "at regular club prices," but Columbia House didn't hide this fact in its ads. If you didn't want the upcoming selections, you sent the card back saying so.

For me and many others, this "club" provided a means to build and acquire a record collection quickly while saving some money, and with the convenience of home delivery. I have all of my records and tapes from the 1950s and '60s and still enjoy them.

Many people were able to acquire music at an affordable price due to Columbia House's "unethical" practices. I even did the unethical when I surmised I could join the club under different names and get the introductory offers again, thus building my collection further. I was not " beholden" to Columbia House forever because it never came after me.

Nostalgia? For Columbia House? You bet.

Richard Nichols

Yucca Valley

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ON THE GROUND IN CHILMARK, MASS. WITH CHRISTI PARSONS

08/12/2015

Los Angeles Times

President Obama's motorcade snaked through the woods here the other night, past open fields of Queen Anne's lace and a lone doe, but none of the crowds that usually gather for presidential visits to small towns.

After a 15-minute drive, headed to dinner at a restaurant with the first lady, Obama finally passed two women on the side of the road who stopped to wave and smile.

Despite a few rainy days that kept him off the golf course, Obama and his family are enjoying something they rarely get the rest of the year -- a quiet community where nobody much cares where they go.

On this 96-square-mile island off the coast of Cape Cod, it's no big deal for a president to spend some down time. Chief executives since Ulysses S. Grant have made the trek for the fresh ocean air and wide-open wetlands and woods.

This weekend, Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Rodham Clinton will arrive for a visit that may include a get-together with the Obamas. She'll probably attend the birthday party of Democratic elder Vernon Jordan, and she is expected to appear at a fundraiser at a wealthy supporter's compound in Edgartown.

The Secret Service long ago figured out how to secure the traveling White House amid the writers, artists and other celebrities, as well as thousands of non-famous people, who own or rent summer homes here. The island's population swells from 15,000 in the winter to more than 100,000 in August.

President Clinton loved the pastoral views, long Atlantic beaches and ice cream shops -- where he stood

in line with other customers -- so much that he came every summer of his presidency but one. Now on his sixth summer visit, Obama may well match that record.

"If the motorcade is going by I'll stop and watch," said Thomas Dresser, a year-round resident and author of several books about the Vineyard. "But we're not racing down the street every time we hear he's headed to the golf course."

Since arriving by helicopter last weekend, Obama's schedule has included a familiar mix of mornings with his family and afternoons on one of the island's golf courses with his buddies, including summer resident and comic Larry David.

It's easy to stay connected to Washington at the spacious beachfront compound the Obamas have rented on the island's north shore, which faces the placid Vineyard Sound and not the unruly Atlantic.

National security advisor Susan Rice is here to brief him on Syria, Iraq and elsewhere, while Deputy Chief of Staff Anita Decker Breckenridge keeps him up to speed on White House efforts to win support for his nuclear deal with Iran.

A series of TV and radio interviews taped just before he left Washington, along with his letter to the editor in the New York Times about the Voting Rights Act, have kept up a light presidential presence in the news. But barring a sudden crisis, the White House warned weeks ago that Obama planned no public events during his holiday.

It's the remote nature of the Vineyard -- most people come on a 45-minute ferry from Cape Cod or by air -- that has drawn presidents over the years.

Grant learned of it as a general during the Civil War, when two Vineyard ferries were conscripted into the Union Navy. Years later, in 1874, he came as president and stayed in a rustic cottage in the Methodist Wesleyan Grove Campground. The gingerbread cottages still draw tourists to Oak Bluffs, one of six towns on the island.

Grant "put the Vineyard on the map, and it became a place where tourists would go," said Dresser, author of "Martha's Vineyard, a History" and a local historian. "Having the president choose the place kind of drew the national attention, just as it does today."

Franklin D. Roosevelt headed here in August 1941, telling reporters he needed to get away from the heat in Washington.

Instead he sneaked off the presidential yacht and onto a Navy heavy cruiser, the Augusta, in the waters off Menemsha and sailed in secret to Newfoundland, Canada, to meet British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who arrived on his own warship.

It was at that summit, even before the Pearl Harbor attacks brought the U.S. into the war, when they forged the principles of the Atlantic Charter, a policy statement that set Allied goals for the postwar world.

Although President Kennedy maintained a family compound in Hyannis, across the sound on Cape Cod, he liked to sail near the Vineyard. His widow, Jacqueline Kennedy, later bought a remote 377-acre property on the wind-swept Atlantic dunes along Moshup Trail, on the westernmost part of the island.

Her daughter, Caroline Kennedy, the U.S. ambassador to Japan, has put several parcels of the land up for sale, but has kept most of the pristine property from development.

Since then, the Vineyard has mostly drawn Democratic presidents, not a great surprise since Massachusetts remains among the most reliably blue of states in presidential elections.

Ronald Reagan preferred chopping wood at his ranch in the mountains north of Santa Barbara. George

H.W. Bush raced speedboats at his family compound on the rugged, rocky coast in Kennebunkport, Maine.

His son, George W. Bush, preferred the wilting heat of his ranch in Crawford, Texas. "Most Americans don't sit in Martha's Vineyard, swilling white wine," he famously said there in 2002.

That appeared a jab at the Clintons, who had revived Martha's Vineyard as a presidential retreat. Bill Clinton enjoyed sitting in with musical bands, visiting the yearly agricultural fair and browsing the bookstores.

"It became sort of blase," Dresser said. "You would say, 'OK, here comes the president walking down the street. Again.' It became more or less common."

Obama is the beneficiary of that familiarity. Close advisors say he appreciates the chance to blend in, at least a little. But compared with Clinton, he spends little time in public.

So far, the Obamas have gone out for dinner once, to the locally sourced State Road restaurant in West Tisbury. When their daughters were younger, they made at least one run as a family to get ice cream, but public outings with their teenagers are fewer and farther between now.

Neighbors say they think the Obamas should get out on the town every once in a while, just like everyone else here.

They may not stand in line for a glimpse of the president, but they don't mind the "personal and politically symbolic importance" of their annual visitor, said Peter Oberfest, a longtime resident and publisher of the Martha's Vineyard Times.

"Most of us are generally sympathetic and simply like these presidents, and we enjoy our proximity to them and their families," he said.

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Washing away the myth of mine safety

08/12/2015

Los Angeles Times

The definition of a mine, said Mark Twain, is a hole in the ground owned by liars. And this month the industry's biggest lie -- that it can be trusted with our water -- is once again on display as another mining disaster has spilled millions of gallons of toxic mining waste and chemicals into our streams, rivers and lakes.

On Aug. 5, at the abandoned Gold King mine in southwest Colorado, a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency cleanup team inadvertently unleashed into a tributary of the Animas River a 3-million-gallon soup of toxic mining wastewater. The accident has closed the Animas indefinitely and threatens drinking water supplies, the economy and wildlife in the region, into New Mexico and potentially all the way to Lake Powell.

This latest tragedy followed by one year almost to the day a pair of mine containment failures in Canada and Mexico.

On Aug. 4, 2014, at the Mount Polley copper and gold mine in central British Columbia, an earthen dam built 17 years ago to hold mining waste laced with mercury, lead, copper and other heavy metals -- called tailings -- failed, inundating the Fraser River watershed.

Three days later and 1,200 miles south at the Buena Vista copper mine in Sonora, Mexico, 10 million gallons of mining acid turned the Bacanuchi and Sonora rivers orange with poisonous chemicals, shutting down drinking water supplies, closing schools and affecting an estimated 800,000 people. Called by Mexico's environment minister the "worst natural disaster provoked by the mining industry in the modern history of Mexico," the spill was apparently caused by recently constructed but defective holding tanks.

This trio of mining disasters is, or at least should be, a wake-up call. In an era of advancing climate change, fresh water is the indispensable natural resource, essential to life for everyone everywhere, and becoming more valuable with each day of deepening drought. Yet staggering quantities of this precious resource are consumed by mining exploration, operations and long-term maintenance. Each year, roughly 180 million tons of tailings flow into rivers, lakes and oceans -- an estimate that leaves out the unpermitted contamination caused by containment failures like those at Gold King, Mount Polley and Buena Vista.

Federal decision-makers should consider this damage as they decide whether to permit a host of massive mine projects around critical water bodies.

Best known is a proposal to build the largest copper and gold mine in North America at the headwaters of the world's greatest wild salmon fishery, in southwest Alaska, which produces 30 million to 50 million fish each year. If the Pebble Mine were built as planned, it would generate an estimated 10 billion tons of mining waste laced with toxics -- about 3,000 pounds for every person on Earth -- to be contained forever in an area of high seismicity behind earthen dams as tall as the Three Gorges Dam in China. According to the EPA, the project poses a catastrophic risk to the waters of Bristol Bay, its wild salmon fishery and the \$1.5 billion in revenue and 14,000 jobs it sustains each year.

The battle over the Pebble Mine will set the stage for a long list of other proposed mining projects in risky proximity to critical waters: in Oregon, a nickel mine on a federally designated wild and scenic river that feeds the communities and natural wonders of the Northern California redwood coast; in Minnesota, copper and nickel mines that threaten the pristine waters of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness; in Montana, the Black Butte copper mine on Sheep Creek in the upper watershed of the Smith River, a state-designated Blue Ribbon Trout Fishery and an essential source of irrigation and stock water for ranchers.

Although mining industry advocates argue correctly that mining is essential -- copper, for example, is ubiquitous in our cars, phones, computers and appliances -- there's no denying that mining is a dirty business. According to the EPA, mining produces more toxic waste than any other industry -- about 25% of the entire U.S. toxics inventory.

The permissive General Mining Law of 1872, written to encourage mining, is still in force even though the pick, shovel and pan were long ago replaced by giant earthmovers that gouge open pits more than a mile across and thousands of feet deep. Billions of gallons of water are consumed in production, pumped through miles of vulnerable pipelines and stored in open pits of acidifying waste; huge swaths of land are destroyed in the wake of closed, abandoned and inadequately remediated mines.

After this month's mine disaster on the Animas, there is even less reason to believe the self-serving, impossible promises of mining executives who claim that with good engineering, they can protect our waters for centuries. Although cutting-edge technology should be mandatory for all mining today, not all areas are mandatory for mining. Assurances of safety must be skeptically reviewed. And some mining projects -- such as the Pebble Mine -- just aren't worth the risk.

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